not-so-

IN COMMON CAUSE

In fact, Common Cause is a lobby for those who would like to keep things pretty much the way they are.

By STEPHEN CHAPMAN

"*EVERYBODY'S ORGANIZED BUT THE PEOPLE.*" That was the slogan used by John W. Gardner seven years ago in launching a membership drive for Common Cause, his new, self-styled "citizens' lobby." If it was true then, it's not true any more. "The people"—at least those who defer to John Gardner as their guardian—are now one of the best-organized lobbies in Washington, and one of the biggest and best-financed. Who would have guessed that in a nation distinctive for its tradition of interest-group bargaining, the people could be a force for change? In a town where idealistic "public interest" lobbies are lodged on every street corner, as transient as Capitol Hill secretaries and leaving no deeper imprint on national policy, Common Cause has written an uncommon success story.

Created seemingly *ex nihilo* by a bland former HEW secretary with the patrician bearing and ostentatious piety of an Episcopalian vicar, the group swelled in three years to 314,000 members. With the dispersal of President Nixon's criminal clan, Common Cause's numbers have fallen to 250,000, but its prestige and clout on Capitol Hill have continued to grow. The *National Journal*, a highly regarded weekly on politics and government, recently reported that, in addition to achievements in Washington, Common Cause has gotten legislative reforms enacted by every state: an accomplishment probably unmatched by any lobby group, private or public interest, in American history. Its success has the breathtaking quality of some good-government fairy tale come to life, with Gardner cast as a wily Mr. Smith doing things Jimmy Stewart never would have dreamed of.

Much of the credit goes to Gardner, for a decade now the nation's chief custodian of high-mindedness. Although he resigned as president in 1977, Common Cause remains largely his lengthened shadow, and he continues to be active on the group's governing board. Gardner has his office in the same building as Common Cause's, and there is no evidence of a change of policy since he left the helm.

STEPHEN CHAPMAN is a staff writer for the New Republic *and has contributed to the* Washington Monthly *and the* Texas Monthly.

Though he is now a familiar spokesman for the public interest, surely there never was a less likely tribune of the masses. In credentials and thinking, Gardner embodies the American establishment in whose bosom he has spent most of his adult life. It is fitting, therefore, that Gardner's Common Cause group relied on the wealthy and established for start-up money, has pushed proposals that lend themselves to manipulation by the elite, and in practice serves as a lobbying group for the upper middle class.

After doing his undergraduate work at Stanford and getting his Ph.D. in psychology in 1938 from the University of California, Gardner taught at two posh women's colleges, Connecticut College and Mount Holyoke, before enlisting in the marines in 1942. From there he went to work for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA; in the OSS he assisted Harvard psychologist Henry Alexander Murray, and after the war Murray found Gardner a job at the Carnegie Corporation.

In 1947, Gardner saw that the new international role assumed by the United States needed better backup in the universities. Together with his colleagues at the Carnegie Corporation, he approached Harvard University with a proposal for an interdisciplinary research institute that would examine America's foe in the emerging Cold War. To head this new Russian Research Center, Gardner and the Carnegie staff suggested anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, like Gardner a veteran of the OSS. The center was set up, and is still active.

Gardner was the man who persuaded James B. Conant to write his famous reports on the American high school for the Carnegie Corporation. Besides serving as president of Harvard and as a diplomat, Conant had been the planner in charge of the atomic bomb for the Office of Scientific Research during World War II. He had frankly set forth his aims for the American high school in a series of lectures in 1952 in which he enlisted education in the Cold War and lashed out at parochial schools as a "threat to our democratic unity." Afterwards, Gardner signed him up to write the Conant Reports, which advocated increased centralization of the public schools and came out at a time when the orbiting of sputnik, in Gardner's words, "led the

American people to take a fresh look at their educational system."

As Elizabeth Drew once noted, Gardner keeps a photo of Conant on his office wall. Gardner also keeps a photo of another of his heroes in his office: Abraham Flexner, whose report on medical schools in 1910 was the principal propaganda weapon of the American Medical Association in gaining control over the admission of new doctors into the profession via licensing laws and the regulation of medical schools. Gardner's hero was the most influential twentieth-century spokesman for the medical cartel, which has succeeded in keeping the number of doctors low and the price of health care high. In addition, from his position on the Rockefeller-financed General Education Board, which had provided much of the money for the medical school campaign and which dominated northern philanthropic support of black education, Flexner orchestrated, beginning in 1914, a largely successful effort to reduce the number of black liberal arts colleges and channel black education in the South in the direction of vocational training.

Gardner remained at the Carnegie Corporation for twenty years, becoming president in 1955 and churning out the kind of books—for example, the gracefully titled *Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?*—one might expect of a fourth-rate mind whose owner had long forgotten the distinction between financial success and intellectual quality. When he finally let himself be lured away from the sanctuary of the well-intentioned, it was to advance the creation of the Great Society, one of the most spectacular and extravagant failures of our time. In January 1968, perhaps sensing that the ship had sprung a leak, Gardner made his escape. Although Common Cause would later lobby intensely to end American involvement in Southeast Asia, when Gardner left the administration he went out of his way to insist that his departure signaled no break with President Johnson on the war. This was only weeks before old hawks like Robert McNamara and Clark Clifford began urging the President to take measures to reduce American involvement. And no one should forget that Gardner was quick to dismiss the participants in the campus anti-war movement as "playpen revolutionaries."

On the home front Gardner nurtured the corporate state.

All this looks like an incongruous background for a man who claims to speak for an "organized citizenry" in order to "revitalize 'the System' and change the nation's disastrous course," as he put it in 1971. Just exactly when Gardner was born again as a populist remains a mystery, and some wonder whether such a conversion ever in fact took place. Certainly nothing in his numerous activities—which have included serving as a director of Shell Oil, the New York Telephone Company, Time, Inc., and American Airlines—suggests any special closeness to the people.

But perhaps most noteworthy in the career of John Gardner is his special relationship with the Rockefeller family. Not long after leaving HEW Gardner was named a trustee of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, with which he had been associated since the 1950s. Some of the fund's contributions support innocuous activities—assisting theater groups and financing a variety of civic projects—but some underwrite activities considerably less innocent.

The fund originally was set up by Nelson Rockefeller, who had decided that the nation required his counsel on military and foreign policy. Accordingly, he rounded up like-minded scholars, journalists, government officials, and other distinguished citizens to prepare reports on such matters. The studies issued by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, as might be expected, took an interventionist, anti-Communist line of the most bellicose and alarmist type. One in particular, "International Security: The Military Aspect," boosted the career of a then obscure Harvard professor named Henry Kissinger, who supervised its preparation.

Kissinger's report warned ominously that "the United States is rapidly losing its lead over the USSR in the military race . . . Unless present trends are reversed, the world balance will shift in favor of the Soviet bloc." (Remember, this was 1957.) To prevent such a shift, the study urged increased military spending and a new drive to build bomb shelters to protect the citizenry in case of a nuclear war—which the signatories thought was imminent. It also advised Americans to put aside their misgivings about using every available means to further the aims of their government's foreign policy: "The willingness to engage in nuclear war, when necessary, is part of the price of our freedom." In this grim march to Armageddon, John Gardner was in perfect lock step.

WHEN NOT PROMOTING THE CAUSE OF interventionist liberalism in foreign policy, Gardner has been nurturing the corporate state at home. He has continually stressed the importance of a "partnership" between government and business. In such partnerships the government usually channels public money to big corporations or puts private institutions to work to further an expansionist foreign policy. For example, Gardner endorsed federal subsidies to build the supersonic transport plane, a venture that the private aircraft industry knew would be unprofitable without massive government help. And even today he can, with a straight face, cite the health care industry as an exemplary case of government and the private sector working together: "Now on medicare we find the insurance companies sharing with the government the task of setting up the actual system. The National Institutes spend over a billion dollars a year, $900 million of which goes to the universities. And all of that $900 million is allocated by committees of doctors and scientists acting as consultants to the national government."

Gardner gave further clues about his vision of this "partnership" in the 1967 "Katzenbach Report," which he wrote with Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach and CIA Director Richard Helms. The report endorsed CIA infiltration of and covert use of private American organizations abroad (except educational and charitable ones) whenever necessary to protect "overriding national security interests." It also recommended providing public funds to assist "organizations which are adjudged deserving, in the national interest, of public support." As to exactly what sort of organizations and activities should get such help, the report was deliberately vague.

Following his stint in Lyndon Johnson's cabinet, Gardner became head of the National Urban Coalition, a do-good outfit that trumpeted its concern with promoting racial harmony and reinvigorating the nation's cities. The record he compiled at the NUC is hardly more encouraging than the one he left at HEW. One of his favorite causes was urban renewal. Even in 1969 it should have been clear to anyone who was paying attention that urban renewal did nothing to help the poor. Usually such programs meant razing shabby slum homes and forcing their occupants out into the streets, compelling them to find other, generally more expensive housing. And for what purpose? The older homes were replaced by comfortable, modern buildings that housed a more affluent class of people. The poor were generally the losers, because urban renewal eliminated much low-cost housing, and in the cheap housing that remained, rents rose because all those people needed an inexpensive place to live. The tenants who moved into the new dwellings were generally better off financially than their predecessors; they benefited from the increased supply of middle-class housing and from the lower rents in such housing that followed. Building contractors and construction workers of course profited from the government's subsidization of new housing construction.

At the NUC, Gardner also espoused the cause of urban mass transit. The record of such projects as San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and Washington's Metro since then provides little support for mass transit as a solution to transportation problems of the cities. These efforts have been extravagantly expensive. One editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* calculated that Metro could have provided each of its riders with an automobile for less than the cost of building a subway. As in urban renewal, mass transit involves taxes that take from the poor to give to the rich. A casual observer can't help but be struck by the predominance of affluent-looking whites on either Metro or BART, an imbalance that has been confirmed by surveys. Says transportation economist George Hilton: "The trip from suburban areas into the central business district in rush hours has become more and more the province of high-income commuters, as retailing and clerical employment have deserted central business districts for the suburbs."

NUC's victories under Gardner's direction, however, were few. The coalition was a flabby-minded anachronism that lacked a distinctive approach to the nation's problems, a systematic means of getting its views translated, and a broad base of support across the land. By 1968, it seemed that even liberals had begun to lose faith in traditional liberal approaches to public policy.

John Gardner learned from the NUC's errors in organizing, if not in policy matters. Common Cause would suffer none of the handicaps that proved so debilitating to his first venture into lobbying. To launch his next crusade he got plenty of seed money to pay for an expensive recruiting blitz, including full-page advertisements in all the liberal magazines and a direct-mail campaign that reached two and a half million prospective concerned citizens. In no time he had himself one of the biggest political organizations around—so large that speculation soon spread that Gardner saw the organization as a launching pad for a presidential race as a third-party candidate. And at annual dues of $15 and close to 300,000 members, Common Cause soon had so much cash that by 1974 it was officially spending more on lobbying than anyone else in Washington.

Crucial to the organization's survival was the $250,000 Gardner obtained to finance the initial membership drive. Given his connections, one should not be surprised that the original donors read like a Who's Who of the American establishment. The fattest cat, John D. Rockefeller III, gave $25,000. Other large contributions came from Howard Stein, who heads the Dreyfus Corporation; Sol Linowitz, former chairman of the board of Xerox who recently was a negotiator of the Panama Canal treaty; John Hay Whitney, former publisher of the *New York Herald-Tribune* who was U.S. ambassador to Great Britain; Roy Larsen and Andrew Heiskell, respectively publisher and president of Time, Inc.; Walter Haas, former president and chairman of the board of Levi Strauss; and William Golden, trustee of the Mitre Corporation and the New York City Rand Institute, and public member of the Hudson Institute.

But the money that soon began pouring in from ordinary members still did not wean Common Cause away from establishment funding. Since the beginning, donations from people named Rockefeller add up to some $72,000, according to Common Cause. Numerous other recent backers have ties to the Rockefellers, including several present or former members of the influential Council on Foreign Relations (chaired by David Rockefeller). CFR members who have given $500 or more to Common Cause include Stanley Marcus, head of the chic Neiman-Marcus stores; William S. Paley, chairman of CBS; Thomas J. Watson, Jr., chairman of the executive committee of IBM; plus Linowitz and Golden. Other Rockefeller cronies on the list of contributors include Charles Dyson, a corporation executive and member of the council of Rockefeller University; Mrs. A. H. Sulzberger, wife of the publisher of the *New York Times*; Mary Scranton, wife of former Pennsylvania governor William Scranton, who is himself a member of the Rockefeller-sponsored Trilateral Commission and a director of such corporations as IBM, the *New York Times*, and Bethlehem Steel; J. Irwin Miller, board chairman of the Cummins Engine Co., a trustee of the Ford Foundation, and promoter of Nelson Rockefeller for President; and industrialist William Hewlett, former chief executive officer and president of Hewlett-Packard and a director of David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank.

Original donors to Common Cause read like a Who's Who.

COMMON CAUSE'S SUPPORT FROM SUCH wealthy establishment bigwigs has inflamed the imagination of more than one conspiracy theorist. One wonders how these contributions can be justified in the mind of John Gardner, who once wrote, "The most serious obstacle the citizen faces when he sets out to participate is that someone with a lot of money got there first and bought up the public address system . . . It isn't just that money talks. It talks louder and longer and drowns out the citizen's hoarse whisper." Except, of course, at Common Cause, where only the voice of the people is

SOME OF THE COMMON PEOPLE WHOSE MONEY SUPPORTS COMMON CAUSE

(past and present affiliations given for the purpose of identification only)

Leona Baumgartner
New York City Department of Health, Commissioner of Health
New York Foundation, Executive director

William Benton
Benton & Bowles Advertising Agency, Founder and chairman of the board
Encyclopedia Britannica and Encyclopedia Britannica Films, Chairman
Committee for Economic Development, Executive committee, board of trustees
U.S. Senator from Connecticut

Benjamin Buttenwieser
U.S. assistant high commissioner for Germany
Kuhn, Loeb & Co., Advisory board
Tishman Realty & Construction Co., Director

Randolph Parker Compton
Lazard Frères & Co., Vice president
Kidder, Peabody & Co., Vice president
Fund for Peace, Chairman of the board of trustees
United World Federalists, Member, controller

John Cowles
Minneapolis Star and Tribune Co., President, chairman
Des Moines Register and Tribune Co., Chairman of the board
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Trustee

Charles H. Dyson
Dyson-Kissner Corporation, Chairman of the board
U.S. Treasury Department, Representative at Bretton Woods Conference

William Golden
Council on Foreign Relations, Member
New York City Rand Institute, Trustee
U.S. Radiator Co., and its successors, Chairman of the board
Mitre Corp., Trustee

Walter Haas
Levi Strauss & Co., President, chairman of the board

Andrew Heiskell
Time, Inc., Chairman of the board, chief executive officer
National Urban Coalition, Director, cochairman
Harvard Board of Overseers, President

William Hewlett
Hewlett-Packard Co., Cofounder, president, chief executive officer
Chase Manhattan Bank, Director
Utah International, Director
President's Scientific Advisory Committee, Member
Carnegie Institution, Trustee

Amory Houghton, Jr.
Corning Glass Works, Chairman, chief executive officer, director
First National City Bank, Director
Dow Corning Corporation, Director
IBM Corporation, Director
Harvard Board of Overseers

Jacob Merrill Kaplan
Welch Grape Juice Co., Organizer, president, owner
J. M. Kaplan Fund, Inc., President, trustee

Donald Klopfer
Random House, Inc., Chairman of the board, now emeritus

Philip M. Klutznick
Salomon Bros., Limited partner
Committee for Economic Development, Vice president and trustee
World Jewish Congress, President

Sol Linowitz
Xerox Corporation, Chairman of the board, chairman of the executive committee, general counsel
Time, Inc., Director
Pan American World Airways, Inc., Director
Commission on Critical Choices for Americans, Member
Council on Foreign Relations, Member
Trilateral Commission, Member

Stanley Marcus
Neiman-Marcus, President, chairman of the board, chairman of the executive committee
Council on Foreign Relations, Director
Committee for Economic Development, Board of directors
National Urban League, Trustee

Andre Meyer
Lazard Frères & Co., of New York, London, and Paris; Senior partner

J. Irwin Miller
Cummins Engine Co., President, chairman of the board
American Telephone & Telegraph Co., Director
World Council of Churches, Member of central and executive committees
National Council of Churches of Christ, U.S.A.; President
Ford Foundation, Trustee
Urban Institute, Trustee

Stewart Mott
Rubin Realty Co., New York City; Partner, director
Michigan National Bank of Flint, Corporate director
U.S. Sugar Corporation, Corporate director

Louise Ottinger
Mother of Representative Richard Ottinger, New York

William S. Paley
CBS, Chairman of the board
Commission on Critical Choices for Americans, Member
Council on Foreign Relations, Member

Jubal Parten
Woodley Can. Oil Co., President and general manager
Pan American Sulphur Co., Founder, president, chairman of the board
Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Director
Fund for the Republic, Inc.; Organizing director, chairman

Simon Ramo
TRW, Inc., Chairman of the executive committee, vice chairman of the board

Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller
Wife of John D., III
National Council on the Humanities, Member

David Rockefeller
Chase Manhattan Bank, Chairman of the board and chief executive officer
Council on Foreign Relations, Honorary chairman, chairman
Trilateral Commission, Founder

John D. Rockefeller III
Asia Society, Founder, president, chairman
General Education Board, Chairman
Population Council, Inc., Founder, chairman
Agricultural Development Council, Founder, chairman, president
United Negro College Fund, Chairman of national council

John D. Rockefeller IV
Governor of West Virginia

Laurance S. Rockefeller
Citizens Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality, Chairman

Laurance S. Rockefeller, Jr.
Son of Laurance S. and Mary F.

Mary C. Rockefeller
Married to Nelson Rockefeller, 1930 to 1962

Nelson A. Rockefeller
Vice president of the United States
Governor of New York
Assistant secretary of state for American Republics affairs
Commission on Critical Choices for Americans, Chairman
President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, Member

Sandra F. Rockefeller
Daughter of John D. III and Blanchette H.

Sharon Percy Rockefeller
Daughter of Sen. Charles Percy of Illinois
Wife of John D. IV

Steven Rockefeller
Son of Nelson and Mary C.

Mary Scranton
Wife of William Scranton, governor of Pennsylvania

Norton Simon
Norton Simon, Inc., Organizer and founder
Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Member

Howard Stein
Dreyfus Fund, Chairman, president

Iphigene Ochs Sulzberger
Wife of Arthur Sulzberger, President and publisher, New York Times Co.

Thomas J. Watson, Jr.
IBM, Chairman of the executive committee, chairman of the board
Council on Foreign Relations, Member

John Hay Whitney
Ambassador to Great Britain
New York Herald-Tribune, President and publisher

heard. Robert Sherrill, veteran Washington correspondent for *The Nation*, once noted that although Gardner "believes the corporate dollar corrupts politics, he also believes Common Cause is immune from such corruption."

Although the patronage of people like the Rockefellers raises suspicions about the purity of Common Cause, it requires a keen sense of nuance to figure out why such people are interested in the kind of issues Common Cause deals with. One might first note that the organization has steered carefully away from efforts to dismantle the existing machinery of the corporate state. But more significant are the numerous "reforms" in election laws and congressional rules it has advocated, changes that frequently are derided as merely "procedural" but in fact make the political process far more susceptible to manipulation by the wealthy. And in some matters, such as environmentalism, Common Cause has taken clear steps to protect the privileges of the upper classes.

Many of Common Cause's "reforms" have had the unambiguous effect of limiting participation in political contests. Take, for example, the 1974 Campaign Act, a comprehensive law ostensibly aimed at cleaning up political campaigns by such devices as limiting the amount of contributions and total campaign expenses, restricting the amount of one's own money a candidate may spend, and providing public funds to help finance Presidential races. Besides handicapping challengers—since they usually are less well-known than incumbents and thus have to spend more money to have any chance of winning—the public financing provision in effect perpetuates the two-party system forever. To receive federal funds, a third party must have gotten no less than five percent of the popular vote in the previous election and must be able to obtain a place on the ballot in at least ten states. That may not sound very difficult, but the requirement effectively crippled the 1976 campaign of Eugene McCarthy, even with his advantage of being a nationally known figure who had made a strong race for the Democratic nomination only eight years before. Forced to rely exclusively on private contributions while his major party opponents received federal subsidies —even in the primaries—McCarthy never had a chance.

One can hardly help suspecting that the obstacles to third-party candidates presented by the 1974 act were deliberate. When Common Cause was founded, the memory of George Wallace's 1968 campaign, which attracted 13 percent of the popular vote and 46 electoral votes, was still fresh in the minds of those wealthy individuals who had been providing financial support to the two major parties for decades. The specter of a strong third party, out of the ideological mainstream and owing nothing to them, must have been rather frightening. Quite possibly they saw public financing as a way of stifling any prospective third parties—an approach that could be cloaked in the guise of idealistic reform.

Third parties traditionally have been the refuge of America's ideologues, whose influence in today's major parties is diluted to the point of ineffectuality. When a political movement on either the left or the right can't gain control of one of the major parties, it may seek to create its own party. This was done on behalf of Eugene McCarthy and both George and Henry Wallace, as well as in the less publicized cases of the Libertarian party and a number of socialist parties.

By institutionalizing the two-party system in a federally subsidized program, Common Cause's campaign reforms almost inevitably restrict the voter's choice to the major parties, whose common views and interests far outweigh their superficial differences. The establishment consists of people who have made (or inherited) their fortunes under the existing rules; by definition, they are the group most likely to feel threatened by drastic political changes, since they have the most to lose. Thus it is in their interest to promote broad-based, consensus-seeking parties of relatively conservative views, and to hamper all ideological movements. "Extremists of the right and the left work with purposeful enthusiasm," wrote John Gardner in 1968, "to deepen our suspicion and fear of one another and to loosen the bonds that hold the society together. The trouble, of course, is that they may succeed in pulling the society apart." Or maybe the trouble is that they will compel their complacent fellow citizens to pay attention to matters the public had previously ignored.

The rich and established also have an interest in laws requiring disclosure of, and placing limits on, private contributions to political campaigns, paradoxical though it may seem at first glance. The pervasive influence of a family like the Rockefellers goes far beyond mere cash. Their financial holdings are so extensive, their economic power so unassailable, and their powerful allies so numerous that they have no need of crude measures like bribes, either in the form of money under the table or of campaign contributions. The Rockefellers, after all, can win friends simply by appointing them to corporate or foundation boards or by financing their study projects. David Rockefeller doesn't have to donate to a senator's reelection campaign to be assured of ready access to him; all he has to do is pick up the phone. The same can be said of most of the establishment pillars who contribute to Common Cause. If the supposedly corrupting influence of money is removed from politics, they will lose no influence.

The people likely to be hurt by such "reforms" are those citizens of relatively modest means whose interests—as small businessmen, labor union members, or whatever—are highly vulnerable to government policies, but whose stature is insufficient to guarantee a hearing from those in a position to protect them. Prevented from buying the attention of members of Congress, they may be left without any leverage at all over the policies of their government—which would leave the members of the upper crust with more influence than ever.

COMMON CAUSE'S CONGRESSIONAL REforms, touted as efforts to make Congress more democratic, have actually made it less so by fragmenting some power and centralizing the rest. The principal change in that direction has been the requirement that committee chairmen must be approved by a vote of the party caucus, instead of being chosen solely on the basis of seniority. This change brought an end to the fabled power of committee chairmen. The seniority system, one should keep in mind, was originally installed to limit the power of the Speaker of the House by protecting the independence of the committee chairmen, a reaction to the autocratic rule of Speaker Joe Cannon early in this century. By granting substantial power to chairmen who reflected a variety of sectional and ideological interests, the system frustrated manipulation of the House by nationally prominent interests. Such manipulation is easier when power is centralized in the Speaker. That has been the effect of this alteration in the seniority system: The Speaker

has more power than he has had in decades, while committee chairmen have been emasculated.

Common Cause has also been the principal backer of the notorious lobby disclosure act. This bill, which has the distinction of being opposed by virtually every lobbying organization in Washington, would substantially increase the cost of such activities by adding burdensome new reporting requirements. It has been attacked by the American Civil Liberties Union as an abridgement of the First Amendment right to petition, and by other groups as a threat to their very existence. The lobby disclosure bill would almost surely curtail the activities of grass-roots lobbying organizations, but not the activities of Common Cause, which can easily afford to meet the new rules.

On one genuine grass-roots movement, the tax revolt, Common Cause has had little comment, but it opposes the campaign—recently endorsed by California Governor Jerry Brown—to call a constitutional convention to consider an amendment requiring a balanced federal budget except in cases of emergency—ostensibly because it doubts that such a convention could legally be limited to this one matter. One way to avoid a constitutional convention is for Congress to amend the Constitution on its own. Common Cause has not recommended this course, however. Gardner's views on taxation are more or less what one would expect of a former Great Society general. "We're going to have to increase taxes," he told Elizabeth Drew of the *New Yorker* in 1973. "Politicians don't like to talk about raising taxes, but it's as inevitable as tomorrow's dawn."

Its proposals lend themselves to ready use by the elite.

Another concern of Common Cause that appeals particularly to its upper-middle-class constituency is environmentalism. As William Tucker has shown, this is often merely a guise in which local aristocrats mobilize to prevent changes they find distasteful or indecorous. Since the choice to be made is frequently between economic growth and development on the one hand and scenic beauty on the other, environmentalism tends to be indulged in only by those who have already made it. Few issues divide Americans along clearer class lines. A study by a California commission found that most campers were distinctly upper middle class—and that their enjoyment of nature was being subsidized by those taxpayers farther down the income scale. Last year's Democratic primary in Minnesota provided a dramatic illustration of the anger that can be aroused among rural citizens against urban romantics who want to replace powerboats and snowmobiles with canoes and cross-country skis.

A notable ploy of Laurance Rockefeller deserves special mention for its audacity. His tactic was to buy a large estate in a remote area (St. John in the Virgin Islands), build a plush retreat for the rich, get tax-exempt status for the actual site, and then donate the surrounding land to the government to serve as a park. Laurance gets a nice tax break, and the people who frequent his resort get protection from the intrusion of real estate developers and ill-bred neighbors. The taxpayers, meantime, get to pay for maintaining the park, keeping it up to the standards of its wealthy neighbors.

The point of these examples is to indicate that the platitudes of environmentalism are often a facade, a well-manicured effort to protect politically the privileged position of people who have the time and money to enjoy nature at their leisure. Often they involve shutting out people of lower station—who then help foot the bill. One should note that Common Cause's environmentalist efforts represent one of its few ventures outside the realm of "procedural" reform. No doubt the organization and its supporters regard this issue as critically important.

IN LOOKING AT COMMON CAUSE'S OVERALL record, one should not make the mistake of regarding the organization as a tool of the superrich. Its real constituency is not the handful of wealthy establishment figures who make large donations, but the mostly white, upper-middle-class citizens who make up the bulk of its membership. Common Cause's reforms tend to serve their interests even more clearly than those of the superrich. One reason these people show so much concern about weakening the hold of "special interests" on the government is that they are not members of any special interest groups. Common Cause no doubt counts among its members very few farmers, labor union members, blacks, or even executives of steel firms or shoe manufacturers. Some may be doctors and lawyers, two interest groups whose influence on the government, like that of the Rockefellers, is so longstanding and pervasive as to lie beyond the reach of any changes in lobbying regulations or campaign laws. But many are simply well-to-do white-collar workers who have no organized interest group to lobby on their behalf, and who thus have every reason to want to dilute the strength of "special interests" whose aims clash with their own.

Neither should one discount the persistence of humanitarian instincts in this group. Unquestionably most of the people who join Common Cause sincerely believe they are helping to improve the lives of all of us, and in some respects they may be right. Goals like "opening up the system" and "making Congress accountable" have a definite, if rather ill-defined, appeal to that peculiar American sense of right and wrong. In any event, supporting such causes helps to salve the conscience of the well-to-do liberal without actually presenting a danger to his obvious economic interest: namely, maintaining an upper-middle-class station. More drastic steps to solve social and economic problems might similarly relieve guilt, but unfortunately they would also threaten the position of those who thrive on the status quo.

To understand why Common Cause pursues the policies it does, it is essential to keep in mind that, like any successful organization, this one follows certain rules of bureaucratic self-interest. By concentrating on a few innocuous-sounding legislative and environmental matters, Common Cause has welded together a large and powerful constituency—a large chunk of affluent white America. Whatever else one can say about it, Common Cause's shrewd approach has earned it the right to speak for that group of Americans. That is why Common Cause has accomplished as much as it has, why it commands so much respect in Washington, and why it means so much to those whose interests it represents. ❑